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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004503

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, INR/NESA, INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2013

TAGS: [KISL](#) [SOCL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: (U) ISLAMISTS PROTEST SUPERSTAR CONCERT

REF: AMMAN 5339

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reason 1.5 (d)

1. (C) Summary: A small gathering of Islamists, members of the National Assembly among them, protested the Sept. 18-19 "Superstar" pop music concert held in Kuwait as "unIslamic." The protest highlights a major division in Kuwaiti society, and could backfire given the popularity of such entertainment among Kuwaitis. Islamists have their sights on the liberal Information Minister, Mohammed Abulhasan. End Summary.

2. (U) On the evening of September 18, fifty Islamists, led by former Secretary-General of the Salafi movement, Hamed Al-Ali, gathered at Kuwait's Mishref Fair Grounds to demonstrate their opposition to the Arab "Superstar" concert being held there. According to local daily The Arab Times, the protestors "tried in vain to convince people not to attend the concert, as hundreds of people rushed into the hall.8 The show was completely sold out that night and the next, despite ticket prices of KD 15, 20 and 25 (a range of roughly \$50-83 per ticket).

3. (U) The concert featured 12 male and female Arab singers who had competed in a popular Lebanese television show entitled, &Superstar8 for the title of the 'best Arab singer in the world' (reftel). Islamists opposed it as a display of westernized decadence. They reached for the moral high ground by portraying the concerts as an affront to the memories of Kuwaiti POW,s in Iraq, whose deaths had only recently been confirmed.

4. (U) Members of the parliamentary Islamist Bloc, led by MP Dr. Faisal Al-Mussallam Al-Otaibi, have since requested a meeting with PM Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah to air their grievances against Minister of Information Mohammed Abulhassan, for having allowed the concert to proceed. Abulhassan was already under attack from Islamists in the National Assembly for refusing to ban books they deem unacceptable from an upcoming bookfair, and for briefly having Kuwaiti TV show pictures of Kuwaiti mosques at prayer times, instead of pictures of the Holy Mosque in Mecca and Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

5. (C) Despite the objections of Islamists, it appears Kuwait may see more such concerts and cultural events. An official of Kuwait's government-sponsored Touristic Enterprises Co. told Embassy PAO that PM Shaykh Sabah feels the GOK has enough support from the Kuwaiti public to ignore Islamist protests and has authorized Abulhasan to do so.

6. (C) Comment: Islamist MP,s have been casting about for opportunities to challenge the new government, and in Abulhasan they have found a tempting target. Abulhasan is a member of the Shia minority, an ardent liberal and someone they can definitely tar with the &American8 brush (Until this year, he was for many years Kuwait,s PermRep at the U.N.). By railing against "Superstar," the Islamists may have picked the wrong cause: Kuwaitis followed the Lebanese show avidly, and some local dailies described the turnout for the two shows as "unprecedented." Boredom is a huge problem in this rich little desert emirate, and "Superstar" at least had the merit of featuring Arab performers and a winner more traditional than some of the other contestants.

JONES